THE GOOD NEWS IS PEOPLE ARE REALIZING WE'RE ON OUR OWN

AN AWAKENING OF PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE AGENCY

A significant shift in perspective is occurring as people increasingly realize that they are on their own and must take responsibility for their own lives. This development is considered positive because it marks a transition toward independence and away from a reliance on external systems or a preoccupation with those who operate behind the scenes. Individuals are no longer waiting for permission or assistance; instead, they are starting to take decisive action to secure their own futures.

CASE STUDY: THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE OF MCDOWELL COUNTY

The reality of being on one's own is perhaps most evident in regions like McDowell County, West Virginia, where federal programs and subsidies have failed to provide a permanent solution to poverty. Residents in this area have little remaining faith in the government to restore their economic fortunes, leading to a local consensus that no external savior is coming to help.

The economic data for the region illustrates a severe decline: since 1975, nonfarm employment has dropped by 78%, and the county has lost 67% of its population. This decline is primarily due to the loss of the coal industry, which once served as the primary economic engine but has since been replaced by mechanization or shut down entirely. Currently, the estimated median household income in the county is approximately $35,000, and two-thirds of households with children rely on food stamps.

THE FAILURE OF INSTITUTIONAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT

The realization that nobody is coming to save these communities includes an acknowledgment of the failure of both the federal government and Corporate America. Government initiatives, such as the War on Poverty, have often left communities in a state of continued dependence rather than fostering prosperity.

Similarly, Corporate America has demonstrated that its primary focus remains on quarterly profits rather than the stability of the communities in which it operates. For example, Walmart frequently closes underperforming stores regardless of how vital those locations may be to the local population. This abandonment by traditional institutions has forced a return to localized resilience.

GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES AND LOCAL RESILIENCE

In the face of institutional withdrawal, residents are developing their own solutions to maintain their communities. Jason Tartt, a descendant of coal miners, is an example of this local leadership; he is currently teaching retired miners and individuals recovering from opioid addiction how to farm the local hillsides.

Other community-driven efforts include local pastors organizing bottled-water drives to assist neighbors whose tap water has become undrinkable. Additionally, some small towns are attempting to repurpose abandoned corporate infrastructure, such as converting shuttered retail spaces into factories, in hopes of sparking a new economic cycle. While these efforts are small compared to historical government programs, they represent a vital source of hope and renewal driven by the resilience of the people themselves.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL COSTS OF DEPENDENCY

Long-term dependence on external aid can be damaging to the social fabric of a community, often breeding helplessness, passivity, and addiction. Those who benefit from the existing status quo—such as Wall Street, the federal government, and major corporations—often dismiss local alternatives as impractical because these alternatives do not require their involvement or funding.

However, practical alternatives like the Regenerative Farmers of America are proving to be viable paths for those willing to take the first step. As the Chinese proverb suggests, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and for many, that step is the transition toward self-reliance.

REDEFINING SELF-RELIANCE AS A COMMUNITY EFFORT

While the term self-reliance may sound like an individual pursuit, it is fundamentally an effort rooted in community. No single person can fulfill every necessary function on their own, making the cooperation of neighbors and local networks essential.

The strength of this movement lies in its expansion; as more people participate in local self-reliance, the security and independence of every participant are enhanced. By focusing on community-based action rather than waiting for external intervention, people are successfully taking charge of their own lives and building a more resilient future.